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THE JACK AND THE JOKER

A play about Bob Edwards

by

Gwen Pharis

Robert Chambers Edwards, M.L.A., was born in Edinburgh, Scotland, on September 12, 1864. He received his education at Glasgow University and continued his studies at Berlin, Paris, and Rome. While in France he published a newspaper in English called The Channel which was a favorite with the tourists. In 1895 he moved to this continent.

His first journalistic venture in Canada was The Wetaskiwin Free Lance, published in the late nineties. The first Eye Opener was published on March 4, 1902 at High River. In 1904 he moved to Calgary where, with the exception of a break or two when he was in Port Arthur and Fort William, he published for eighteen years. He was elected an Independent Member of the Legislative Assembly during the general election of 1921. While campaigning for this office he never once used his paper to advertise his own cause. He died at his home in Calgary on November 17, 1922.

Bob Edwards, quiet, retiring, sensitive to a fault in his private life, could wield a pen with a master hand in trenchant criticism. He loved the west, and his faith and confidence in the ultimate destiny of Western Canada was unbounded. In every civic or political campaign he was a power to be reckoned with. His profound knowledge of politics, both federal and provincial, enabled him to forecast political developments with an accuracy which made him an outstanding figure in Canadian journalism. The main, and yet the least known characteristic of his life, was his generosity to the poor and the down and out. His love and understanding of the "little people" and his thorough dislike of sham and snobbery areclearly underlined in his bright humour and brittle satire of the Eye Opener.

-- Maryo K. Gard

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THE JACK AND THE JOKER

A play about Bob Edwards

by

Gwen Pharis

SCENE: The office of the Sheep Creek Eye Opener.

TIME: A June morning, 1904.

CHARACTERS:
Bob Edwards
Claribelle Gudgeon
Dorinda Carp
Bertha Foggin
Dudley B . Carp
Florence Wize
James Foggin

The office of the Sheep Creek Eye Opener is far from richly appointed. The furniture consists of a large desk, a swivel chair, one or two other chairs, and a coat rack and sofa of the period, all worn and mended. There are cartoons, calendars, etc. on the walls. In the rear wall, left of centre, is a door leading into the press room and down right is a door leading outside. There is a window on the right wall.

At the beginning of the play Bob Edwards is seated at his desk, writing and trying over his sentences to himself:

EDWARDS: "Let me frolic with the Jack and the Joker and still win the game. Let me . . . .

(Mrs. Gudgeon enters. She is an old lady, her joints are stiffened with rheumatism. She wears rusty black clothes and an outlandish hat. She comes in and immediately begins "doing up" the room)

MRS. GUDGEON: Good morning, Mr. Edwards.

EDWARDS: Morning, Mrs. Gudgeon.

MRS. GUDGEON: Have you got the paper out, Lad?

EDWARDS: It will be out by noon.

MRS. GUDGEON: Is the press working all right?

EDWARDS: Fine. I'm going to pay you for it one of these days.

MRS. GUDGEON: I know that, sir. Mr. Edwards, I understand the ladies are very upset about your paper.

EDWARDS: What ladies, Mrs. Gudgeon?

MRS. GUDGEON: The Lotos Club.

EDWARDS: Don't the ladies think my jokes are funny, Mrs. Gudgeon?

MRS. GUDGEON: They're funny enough but the ladies feel they're immoral and unrefined. They're coming to see you, sir.

EDWARDS: You keep an eye on the street and we'll hide.

MRS. GUDGEON: It's Mrs. Carp in particular, sir. She's very angry.

EDWARDS: Does she object to the things I print about her husband?

MRS. GUDGEON: I think that's behind it. You didn't ought to make fun of Dudley Carp, he's considered a very upright man.

EDWARDS: Upright? He's fleeced people right and left for years..

MRS. GUDGEON: Why Mr. Carp's been most kind to me, Sir. Got me the job of doing for the church and this place after Mr. Gudgeon died. And he even helped me invest my insurance money.

EDWARDS: What did you invest in, Mrs. Gudgeon?

MRS. GUDGEON: (Proudly) City lots. I've got three. Very high priced they'll be too in a year or so.

EDWARDS: You bought them from Mr. Carp?

MRS. GUDGEON: I paid a hundred dollars each. Mr. Carp sold them to me cheap-- as a token of esteem, he said.

EDWARDS: I see.

MRS. GUDGEON: So of course it hurts me, lad, to see you using my poor dead husband's printing press to make fun of Mr. Carp -- especially when he's going to run for parliament and all.

EDWARDS: Mrs. Gudgeon, could I see the deeds to your property?

MRS. GUDGEON: Why, yes. I'll get them. (Puts down broom)

EDWARDS: I don't think the bank's open yet.

MRS. GUDGEON: Oh, I wouldn't keep them in the bank. I don't trust banks. I just keep them in my -- in my stocking. If you'll excuse me -- (She goes behind coat rack)

EDWARDS: Do you really want to see Mr. Carp in the legislature, Mrs. Gudgeon.

MRS. GUDGEON: Oh, yes. He makes such fine speeches. A golden tongue, he has. A real golden tongue. (She returns with the deeds) There they are, sir.

EDWARDS: A 21367, 68 and 69. (He scans deed) Have you ever seen this property?

MRS. GUDGEON: Oh, No. I never get to the city, but I'm going to sell the lots next year and retire from charring. My rheumatism's pretty bad lately.

EDWARDS: How can you retire, Mrs. Gudgeon? I need you to help me establish a real Western paper here in Sheep Creek.

MRS. GUDGEON: That's kind of you. The late Mr. Gudgeon had just such a notion. We tried eleven towns before Mr. Gudgeon decided the times just weren't ripe for it. So then he opened a livery.

EDWARDS: (Writing down the numbers) A 21367, 68 and 69. I wonder .. (Getting up) Mrs. Gudgeon, I'll leave you to the cobwebs. I'm going to send a telegram.

MRS. GUDGEON: About my lots, sir?

EDWARDS: Yes -- just to make sure where they are. I may buy some myself.

MRS. GUDGEON: But what about the paper?

EDWARDS: (Getting hat) The paper will have to wait. Perhaps I'll have a real story for the ladies.

MRS. GUDGEON: (At door) Heaven help us, Mr. Edwards, here they come now!

EDWARDS: Who?

MRS. GUDGEON: Mrs. Carp and Mrs. Foggin. Looking very determined.

EDWARDS: We're trapped, Mrs. Gudgeon. We'll have to shoot it out.

MRS. GUDGEON: Now, Mr. Edwards, don't let them browbeat you.

(Mrs. Carp and Mrs. Foggin enter. Dorinda Carp is an arrogant, somewhat affected woman who has always been able to have her own way. She talks down to everyone unless it suits her to cajole. Mrs. Foggin is a milder person with a penchant for ribbons and laces and a heart that thirsts for romance. She is afraid of Mrs. Carp.)

DORINDA: I presume you are Mr. Edwards. We've come here on behalf of the Sheep Creek Lotus Club.

EDWARDS: (With a touch of exaggeration in his courtesy) Ladies, come in. I too enjoy my Tennyson.

DORINDA: I fail to see that Tennyson has anything to do with this matter.

EDWARDS: Have you forgotten, Mrs. Carp?

"Your looks are strange
And do you come like ghosts to trouble joy?
Is there confusion in the little isle?
Let what is broken so remain ...
The Gods are hard to reconcile:
'Tis hard to settle order once again."

MRS. FOGGIN: Mr. Edwards, you've been drinking!

EDWARDS: Mrs. Foggin, I never drink before ten o'clock. (Looking at watch)

DORINDA: We've come to tell you what we think of you and your scurrilous rag -- The Eye Opener. We intend to have your paper stopped.

EDWARDS: Thank you, Mrs. Carp, thank you. Please sit down.

DORINDA: At a special meeting of the Club at my house ---

EDWARDS: Ladies, forgive me. I really can't chat right now. I have to send a telegram. Please make yourselves comfortable until I come back. (At the door) Sorry, I can't offer you tea, Mrs. Carp, but you might find a wee nip of Scotch in the desk. (He goes out right)

DORINDA: Well, I like that! So that's how he receives us.

BERTHA: I told you we should lead up to it gradually, Dorinda.

DORINDA: You're a spineless fish, Bertha. Mrs. Gudgeon!

MRS. GUDGEON: (Jumps startled - she has been dusting around the hat rack) Yes, Ma'am.

DORINDA: Come here.

MRS. GUDGEON: (Straightening her hat and apron to a worse angle than before) Yes, Mrs. Carp.

DORINDA: Do you think the church board would approve of your working for a wine-bibber?

MRS. GUDGEON: Mr. Edwards is a nice gentleman, Ma'am.

DORINDA: Gentleman, indeed! Do you know anything about the company he keeps?

MRS. GUDGEON: I don't, really, Ma'am. Of course he and Mr. Foggin are good friends --

DORINDA: What did I tell you, Bertha? Did you say James was out until two o'clock last night?

BERTHA: I'm sure Jimmy could explain ---

DORINDA: Of course. They always can! (Mrs. Gudgeon turns to go back to her work) Just a minute, Mrs. Gudgeon. Does Mr. Edwards know any women?

MRS. GUDGEON: Well, he knows me.

DORINDA: I meant younger women.

MRS. GUDGEON: He's a great friend of that nice, stylish Mrs. Wize . . . He calls her Florence.

DORINDA: Exactly. Just as I thought. You may go, Mrs. Gudgeon.

MRS. GUDGEON: Yes, Ma'am. (She goes out door at back)

DORINDA: You see, Bertha - he brought that woman here.

BERTha: Mrs. Wize?

DORINDA: And I'm convinced she's here for no good.

BERTHA: Why, she's selling hats, Dorinda.

DORINDA: Hmm! She'll sell no hats to me.

BERTHA: (Her voice lowered) You don't think she's a ... bad woman?

DORINDA: I do. Did you ever see a respectable married woman wearing silk stockings?

BERTHA: Perhaps her husband is rich ---

DORINDA: Mrs. Wize has been here ten days and there's been no sign of a husband, day or night. I think she's an adventuress, working with Edwards.

BERTHA: Really. I read a story about an adventuress once -- (There is a touch or wistfulness in her voice) A widow -- in France.

DORINDA: (Sniffing) France!

BERTHA: Everyone spurned her but she had a loving heart.

DORINDA: There may be room in those foreign countries for widows with loving hearts. There is no room in Sheep Creek.

BERTHA: Sometimes I think a little adventure adds a little spice to life. That's why I didn't mind the Eye Opener --

DORINDA: You read it, Bertha?

BERTHA: Well, Jimmy says Mr. Edwards has a lot of good sense ... and that most of the stories he prints are true ---

DORINDA: (Coldly) I suppose you believe his attacks on Dudley.

BERTHA: Oh, no. I'm sure Mr. Carp wouldn't ---

DORINDA: (Closing in) While Bob Edwards stays here, Dudley will not get into parliament. You want my husband to sit in parliament, don't you, Bertha?

BERTHA: (Weakly) Oh yes, of course. I think it would be lovely. (With a touch of hope) You'd be leaving then, wouldn't you, Dorinda?

DORINDA: We'd move on -- to wider fields, greener pastures.. certainly. Dudley and I have planned that you shall visit us, Bertha, on Parliament Hill.

BERTHA: You're very kind. (At the window) Dorinda, come here! There's Dudley and he's talking to Mrs. Wize. He knows her, Dorinda. So she can't be a bad ---

DORINDA: What's that? (Going to the window) Dudley... So he is. Probably trying to collect her rent.

BERTHA: (With a little squeal of excitement) Dorinda, he's kissed her hand, (Enviously) She does have a way with the men.

DORINDA: Kissed her hand. (Going to the door) Dudley! Dudley! Please come here.. at once!

BERTHA: (Round eyed) What are you going to do, Dorinda?

DORINDA: I'm going to have Bob Edwards and that woman out of this town if it's the last thing I do.

BERTHA: I don't blame you, kissing her hand and all. But that's hardly Mr. Edwards fault.

DORINDA: He brought her here. Introduced her hat shop in his paper. He's demoralizing this town -- and I won't have it!

BERTHA: (At table, noticing a piece of writing on desk) Here's something about Mr. Carp ... (starting to read) "Dudley Carp has just returned from Ottawa where we presume he successfully bartered the interests of the West for the interests of Dudley B. Carp. In our opinion ---

DORINDA: (Snatching the paper from her) I'll take care of that.

(Dudley Carp enters. He is a rather handsome, well-dressed and pompous man of forty odd ... very sure of himself and completely insensitive to other people)

DUDLEY: Dorinda, what are you doing in this place?

DORINDA: I'm doing more than you are, Dudley. I'm looking after your interests.

DUDLEY: Now, Dorinda --

DORINDA: Did you or did you not kiss that woman's hand?

DUDLEY: I kiss the hands of all fair ladies, Dorinda. It's a matter of policy. Allow me, Mrs. Foggin... (He kisses her hand)

BERTHA: (Giggling) Oh Mr. Carp, I feel quite continental.

DORINDA: Dudley is merely electioneering, Bertha. There won't be an election for you, Dudley, if we don't get this paper stopped!

DUDLEY: One must be subtle about these things, Dorinda. Where is Edwards, anyway?

DORINDA: He sneaked away, afraid to face us. Probably drunk by now. Listen to this: "In our opinion the voters of this constituency would be better advised to elect Jed, the Horsethief than Dudley B. Carp. At least they would be prepared for Jed's particular brand of dishonesty." That's to come out today.

BERTHA: Mr. Carp, perhaps if you reasoned with Mr. Edwards, enlightened him ---

DUDLEY: You can't reason with a man like Edwards. We must take action.

DORINDA: At once!

DUDLEY: It's not for myself I object to the man. It's for Sheep Creek and for this great country, soon to become a province, soon to blaze as another jewel in the crown of the Dominion.

DORINDA: You said last night you'd like to see him tarred and feathered and ridden out of town on a rail. Why don't you do it?

DUDLEY: My dear, I could stamp out this man, single handed. But if I do, the voters may believe his lies about me. No, it is not for me ... you must do it. You -- the women, the guardians of virtue and purity.

DORINDA: How?

DUDLEY: Edwards uses a printing press that belongs to old Ma Gudgeon.

DORINDA: Well?

DUDLEY: I happen to know he hasn't paid a cent on the press.

DORINDA: Naturally.

DUDLEY: You ladies get hold of Mrs. Gudgeon and talk her into selling the press to the Lotus Club for cash. I'll pay $200.00 for it but I want my name kept out of it.

BERTHA: Won't Mr. Edwards just buy another?

DUDLEY: He hasn't ten cents in his pocket. He invested everything he had in starting up the paper. If the press goes, Edwards goes ---

DORINDA: Dudley that's just splendid!

BERTHA: Mrs. Gudgeon wouldn't sell the press - if she's promised Mr. Edwards --

DUDLEY: Doesn't she live in a shack owned by the Club?

DORINDA: Of course she does. Very well Dudley. You can leave this to me.

DUDLEY: Here's the money -- my gift to the fair ladies of Sheep Creek.

DORINDA: Clubs like ours must take a firm stand on moral issues, Bertha. (She takes the money) Without us where would morality be?

BERTHA: (Weakly but doubtfully) I suppose there wouldn't be any.

DORINDA: I'd better see Mrs. Gudgeon at the church. He might come back. Well, when we get the press out of here I'll be very happy. Very happy. We have great plans for Alberta, haven't we Dudley?

DUDLEY: Great plans. I want to see this country blossom and bear fruit. I want to see our new virginal province rise unsullied and unstained. When Alberta receives its charter, it must be without such papers as the Eye Opener, without alcohol, and without Bob Edwards.

EDWARDS: (Entering from the street) Show me the province without alcohol, Mr. Carp, and I promise you it will be without Edwards. Well, well, quite a gathering - is it lambs to the slaughter or vultures to the kill?

CARP: Has it occurred to you, Edwards, that I might sue you for libel for stuff like this? (He holds up the paper read earlier)

EDWARDS: Charmed, any time, I'm sure. You see, Dudley, I don't want to see you representing us in government.

CARP: I suppose you have ambitions --

EDWARDS: None. I'M a nobody. The gadfly of Sheep Creek, that's all.

CARP: Do the ranchers pay you for opposing me?

EDWARDS: I can't be bought. You ought to know that, Dudley. You tried.

CARP: Nobody believes your stuff. Why, you're nothing but a one-horse publisher who's drunk most of the time.

EDWARDS: It's all right, Dudley. You go right ahead trying to bow yourself into parliament and I'll go on with my paper. B ut God Help you, Dudley, if I stay in Sheep Creek because you won't make the legislature.

CARP: When a two-bit editor can stop me, I'll let you know ... if I can find the gutter you're lying in.

(Florence Wize enters. She is about twenty-five, gotten up in the extreme of fashion with a few extra touches here and there. Her figure is excellent. Her appearance is lush but she is as ingenuous and trusting as a child)

FLORENCE: Good morning, Mr. -- .... Oh, I beg your pardon. I didn't mean to interrupt anything.

EDWARDS: Come in, Florence.

FLORENCE: (Talking to cover embarrassment) We meet again, Mr. Carp. Isn't it a lovely day, isn't it?

DUDLEY: Indeed it is, Mrs. Wize. (He is about to kiss her hand in its long lace glove)

DORINDA: Dudley!

DUDLEY: Well, I must be running along. You'll attend to that little matter, Dorinda?

DORINDA: I certainly will. (Dudley goes out to the street)

EDWARDS: Mrs. Wize, may I present ---

DORINDA: (Icily) Please don't bother, Mr. Edwards.

FLORENCE: (Apologetically) I shouldn't have broke up your session. You see, I've been in the Klondike and I forget about being formal and all that social swirl.

EDWARDS: No need to be formal, Florence. How's your hat shop going?

FLORENCE: I haven't sold any, Mr. Edwards, but I have some beauties. I hope you ladies are interested in hats, but then I guess every lady is -- hats and men. I know I am.

DORINDA: That's obvious. Come, Bertha.

FLORENCE. Don't you folks go. I'll go along myself. I just came here to meet Mr. Foggin.

DORINDA: Mr. Foggin!

FLORENCE: Yes. Little guy - wears glasses.

BERTHA: Well, really ...

DORINDA: My poor Bertha. Perhaps you'll believe me now.

BERTHA: Mr. Edwards, tell me the truth. Has Mr. Foggin been here?

EDWARDS: I haven't seen him.

DORINDA: Of course he's here -- hiding.

FLORENCE: (Without malice) Where would he be, under the sofa?

DORINDA: You'd better look, Bertha.

BERTHA: I won't demean myself. James Foggin come out from under that sofa if you know what's good for you.

FLORENCE: Jumping Juno, I've lost them ...

EDWARDS: What is it, Florence?

FLORENCE: I'd forget my head if it --- (gathering up herself to go) If Mr. Foggin comes before I get back, you tell him I must have left his trousers in the store ....

DORINDA: You left his what, Mrs. Wize?

FLORENCE: (At the door) Trousers. You know -- a pair of pants. (She goes)

BERTHA: Trousers! Oh, Jimmy ..... (She swoons)

EDWARDS: (Catching her) Here, here, Mrs. Foggin ..... easy now .. Have you any smelling salts, Mrs. Carp. (He places her on the sofa)

DORINDA: Of course not. I'm not given to swooning.

EDWARDS: I'll send Mrs. Gudgeon in with some water. Cold towels on her head should help. (He goes out back)

DORINDA: (Shaking Mrs. Foggin roughly) Bertha, Bertha, now don't be foolish. Wake up. (She leaves Bertha and gets down on her hands and knees in front of the sofa)

DORINDA: Come out, James Foggin. (With her parasol she pokes under the sofa) I don't believe he's there. Isn't that just like a man?

(Mrs. Gudgeon enters from back)

MRS. GUDGEON: Why, Mrs. Carp, what are you looking for?

DORINDA: A man. But he got away. Oh, it's you.

MRS. GUDGEON: Here's some water. Mr. Edwards said to keep her head down and her feet up.

DORINDA: (Flipping water on Mrs. Foggin) Bertha! Bertha! (to Mrs. Gudgeon) Where is Mr. Edwards?

MRS. GUDGEON: He went for Mr. Foggin. Poor lady -- whatever happened?

DORINDA: The heat. Stop fussing.

MRS. GUDGEON: Yes, Ma'am.

DORINDA: Mrs. Gudgeon, I understand you own a printing press.

MRS. GUDGEON: I do.

(Mrs. Carp starts to sit on sofa and sits on Mrs. Foggin)

MRS. GUDGEON: Be careful, ma'am.

DORINDA: (Ignoring her and pushing Mrs. Foggin over a little) Now, Mrs. Gudgeon, I want to give you two hundred dollars of your very own for the press.

MRS. GUDGEON: I'm selling it to Mr. Edwards, ma'am. I only asked $125.00.

DORINDA: The Lotus Club want that press.

MRS. GUDGEON: I'm sorry, Ma'am.

DORINDA: Edwards doesn't intend to pay you. We won't have him cheating an old woman so we're taking it off your hands.

MRS. GUDGEON: But how would Mr. Edwards print his paper?

DORINDA: That is not your concern. Now I'm just writing out a bill of sale -- what is your first name?

MRS. GUDGEON: Claribelle.

DORINDA: You just sign here. Claribelle Gudgeon.

MRS. GUDGEON: Mrs. Carp, I wouldn't do it ... it wouldn't be right.

DORINDA: Be careful, Mrs. Gudgeon. Remember, we're only trying to help you.

MRS. GUDGEON: I respect agreements.

DORINDA: Are you aware that the Lotus Club owns the shack in which you live?

MRS. GUDGEON: Why no, I ... I didn't know ...

BERTHA: (Faintly) Oh, ... trousers ... oh .....

DORINDA: Bertha, get hold of yourself. (With a faint moan Bertha subsides) Now Mrs. Gudgeon, you've never paid any rent for the house. Seven years rent is not to be sneezed at. If you refuse to sell the press, we'll seize it for back rent.

MRS. GUDGEON: Oh no ....

DORINDA: What's more, we'll be forced to put you out.

MRS. GUDGEON: But I haven't any place to go ....

DORINDA: You'll be placed in an old ladies home.

MRS. GUDGEON: Oh no, I couldn't. They wouldn't let me take Timmy -- that's my cat ... Oh Ma'am you wouldn't do that.

DORINDA: Do you know how much rent you owe us?

MRS. GUDGEON: Nobody ever said anything about rent. It's just a shack.

DORINDA: Probably a thousand dollars.

MRS. GUDGEON: If I could sell my lots, I'll go ask Mr. Edwards ... (She starts toward door)

DORINDA: There's no time for that. Now make up your mind. (A pause) Well, Mrs. Gudgeon?

MRS. GUDGEON: I'll sign whatever it is. I couldn't go to an Old Ladies Home ... without Timmy.

DORINDA: That's something like. (Mrs. Gudgeon signs)

BERTHA: (Moaning) Oh, I'm so miserable.

DORINDA: Be quiet, Bertha. There you are, Mrs. Gudgeon, and here's two hundred dollars all for you. Isn't that wonderful?

MRS. GUDGEON: Would you sell me the shack for two hundred dollars, Mrs. Carp?

DORINDA: Now, now, we just won't say anything more about it.

MRS. GUDGEON: I want to be sure I've got a place of my own ... in my last years ...

BERTHA: (Rallying somewhat) Dorinda, I didn't know the Lotus club owned ---

DORINDA: Really, Bertha, how could you? You're not one of our chartered members. You just go back to your cleaning now, Mrs. Gudgeon.

MRS. GUDGEON: (Somewhat dazed) Yes, Ma'am. (She goes out back)

DORINDA: Well, that's done. Now to dismantle the press -- smash it up if necessary --

BERTHA: (Woefully) Oh, I must go and pack. I'm going home to my mother .... after fourteen years.

DORINDA: Don't be a fool, Bertha. You'd just leave him free for his intrigues -- Fight, my dear, fight for the right.

BERTHA: I thought I was a good fighter, but I'm not ... I don't like fighting.

(James Foggin enters. He is a nice ordinary little man who is both faithful and unimaginative)

BERTHA: Jimmy! How could you!

DORINDA: I think you'd be ashamed of yourself. We know why you came here. We know whom you expected to find.

BERTHA: Jimmy, haven't I been everything to you a wife should be?

JIMMY: Bertha -- (He is completely at sea)

BERTHA: Haven't I nursed you through measles ...

JIMMY: Mumps, Bertha.

BERTHA: Haven't I helped you cover the cabbages in a hail storm and mended your socks? Haven't I shared your pillow and baked your bread ...

JIMMY: Bertha, what's come over you?

DORINDA: As if you didn't know ... having intrigues under your poor wife's very eyes ....

JIMMY: Bertha, what's happening here? What are you talking about?

BERTHA: Jimmy, has this been going on every since she came to town?

JIMMY: Who came to town?

BERTHA: I'm leaving, Jimmy. I'm going home to mother.

DORINDA: I suppose you asked Edwards to bring her here.

JIMMY: (Savagely) Damn it, will you keep quiet and let me talk to my wife.

DORINDA: You dare!

BERTHA: (Aghast but thrilled) Jimmy, you swore! You swore at Dorinda Carp!

JIMMY: (To Bertha) Now, Bertha, what's all this about going home to your mother? Bob came to tell me you'd fainted and I rushed on ahead --

BERTHA: (Sobbing quietly) To think you'd cast aside fourteen years with me for a woman with silk stockings and ostrich feathers on her hat.

JIMMY: Ostrich feathers! Who's ostrich feathers?

DORINDA: You planned to meet her here this morning.

JIMMY: Meet who?

BERTHA: Florence Wize.

JIMMY: Mrs. Wize. Heavens, I forgot all about that!

BERTHA: See, you admit it.

(Bob Edwards has entered and is standing quietly in the door smiling)

EDWARDS: Looks like you're in the soup, Jimmy.

JIMMY: I don't admit anything. Do you think there's something between me and Mrs. Wize? Bertha, you're mad.

BERTHA: With grief, Jimmy.

JIMMY: Ask Bob here. Ask anybody. Why I was only coming here to get my trousers .... Mrs. Wize was --

BERTHA: Trousers! Oh, Jimmy! (She swoons again. He catches her)

DORINDA: (Annoyed as Bertha falls) There she goes again.

JIMMY: Bertha, Bertha ... well do something, somebody. Wait, it's her stays. She always makes me lace them too tight. (He starts unlacing her)

EDWARDS: Now take it easy, Jimmy ... Give her a nip of this ...

DORINDA: It's all your fault for bringing that woman here.

EDWARDS: Come now, Mrs. Foggin, just take a little swallow ... that's it ... Not so bad, is it? Now .... just lie back.

BERTHA: (Fluttering) Where am I? Jimmy, don't leave me.

JIMMY: I'm not leaving you, Bertha. Now all of you people that are so interested, listen ... My trousers were in Mrs. Wize's house ... yes ... but I wasn't in them.

DORINDA: (Acidly) That's quite obvious.

JIMMY: (Shouting) I mean I wasn't in her house.

EDWARDS: Let me explain, Jimmy. Mrs. Foggin, last night I met Jimmy and talked him into coming into the Blind Pig with me.

JIMMY: Bob told a story, Bertha, and I got laughing and I spilled a glass of beer all over my trousers.

EDWARDS: Jimmy was afraid you'd know he'd been drinking beer ...

JIMMY: I know you don't like alcohol, Bertha.

EDWARDS: We went outside.

JIMMY: I walked around eating sen sen. I was worried sick ...

EDWARDS: For fear you'd smell the beer on his suit.

JIMMY: We saw Mrs. Wize bringing in her clothes off the line.

EDWARDS: I've known Florence since she was a youngster, and I told her our troubles. Florence said she had a pair of trousers that would just fit Jimmy and she'd take his and clean them.

JIMMY: So I went into the Blind Pig and changed.

EDWARDS: And I handed Jimmy's pants over the fence to Florence.

JIMMY: I arranged to pick up the trousers here.

EDWARDS: And that's how it all happened. I swear, Mrs. Foggin.

JIMMY: If you don't believe me, Bertha, I'll .... well, I'll go home to my mother.

DORINDA: A likely story.

BERTHA: Jimmy, that's all there was to it?

JIMMY: Honest, Bertha, that's all.

BERTHA: Oh, Jimmy, next time don't be afraid to come home. Even if you smell of beer .... even if you smell of rum, Jimmy, just come home. (He pats her awkwardly as she melts in his arms)

(Florence enters at right)

FLORENCE: Oh, there you are, Mr. Foggin. I finally found your ... oh, she's Mrs. Foggin.

EDWARDS: That's right, Florence.

FLORENCE: Well, (Awkardly) well, you see, Mrs. Foggin .... this is a ... It's a tent I was going to ...

EDWARDS: Never mind, Florence. She knows.

FLORENCE: I was trying to help. He must think the world of you to be so upset about a little beer ... Here they are. (Offers the trousers)

BERTHA: Thank you, Mrs. Wize.

DORINDA: Really, Bertha, are you going to forget what you've been through because of this woman? I'm not. Mrs. Wize -- we know what you are -- you husband snatcher!

FLORENCE: You be careful what you call me. I'll tell Bertie ..

DORINDA: And who is Bertie?

FLORENCE: Bertie's my husband. He's beat up on a lot of mashers that thought they could get fresh with me and if you've got a husband I bet he could beat him up with one hand. I bet a dame like you hasn't even got a husband.

DORINDA: I do so have one.

FLORENCE: I pity him then. I bet he sleeps under the kitchen stove.

DORINDA: Why, he does not. The idea!

FLORENCE: Mr. Edwards, you told me Sheep Creek was a nice, quiet town where I could settle down and Bertie could come home week-ends. I thought I'd go to church and visit back and forth and belong to things and raise a family. And here you are, a den of suspicious-minded old dames. I'm not even sure I want to raise a family here ... (to Dorinda) and I think your hat is just awful, so there. (Florence turns and goes out in tears)

DORINDA: Why this hat cost twenty dollars.

BERTHA: I don't blame her, Dorinda. Of course you were so sure ---

DORINDA: I suppose she thinks her hat is stylish.

BERTHA: I'm going to ask her to join the Lotus Club.

DORINDA: You'll do nothing of the kind.

EDWARDS: Now, Mrs. Carp, if Florence wants to belong to the Lotus Club, I think she ought to have the chance.

DORINDA: You're telling me what to do?

EDWARDS: Just suggesting.

DORINDA: Hmmmm!

EDWARDS: I suppose I could write a story about how exclusive the Lotus Club has become under your presidency...

DORINDA: I don't think you will, Mr. Edwards. It happens that the Lotus Club has just purchased the press you've been using. There'll be no more Eye Openers run off that Press!

EDWARDS: (Quietly) I see. (He goes to the back) Mrs. Gudgeon ... Could you step in here a moment?

MRS. GUDGEON: Oh, Mr. Edwards, believe me. I didn't want to sell. They made me.

EDWARDS: It's true then.

MRS. GUDGEON: If I hadn't sold it, they'd have got it anyway.

EDWARDS: Never mind, Mrs. Gudgeon.

MRS. GUDGEON: (Tearfully) I never dreamed they could take my house, lad. Please understand. I had to do it.

EDWARDS: (Patting her shoulder) Here, now, don't you feel so bad. Sheep Creek's no place for a smart, upstanding sober newspaper man anyway. I'll do better somewhere else. I'll flag the old C.P.R. and ---

JIMMY: C.P.R.? Bob, I've got a telegram for you. Forgot all about it with all the .... (Finds it in his pocket) I told Pinky I'd see you got it right AWAY .....

EDWARDS: Thanks, Jimmy. (He tears it open and reads it quickly)

JIMMY: I hope it isn't bad news.

EDWARDS: Bad news? No, I don't believe it is. Jimmy, would you step across and ask Mr. Carp to come over here for a few minutes. Tell him there's a fairly large sum of money involved.

DORINDA: Tell him I want him to dismantle that press. At once.

JIMMY: All right, Bob. Then I'll go on to the store.

BERTHA: Wait, Jimmy, I'll come with you.

EDWARDS: The trousers, Mrs. Foggin. YOU'D better hang on to them after this, Jimmy.

JIMMY: Believe me, I will.

BERTHA: I'll take them home. Do you know I don't think a woman knows how valuable her husband is, until she almost loses him? I'm going right home and bake Jimmy a blueberry pie. (They go)

MRS. GUDGEON: I better get on to my work, sir.

EDWARDS: No, Mrs. Gudgeon. I want you and Mrs. Carp to stay.

DORINDA: I'll stay. I want to see that press removed, personally.

MRS. GUDGEON: Mrs. Carp, ma'am, please sell me my house. All my life I've wanted to be independent in my last days -- I thought I'd retire and learn to paint china.

DORINDA: Paint china! Mrs. Gudgeon, that takes a certain artistic instinct.

MRS. GUDGEON: I know ma'am. It was just an idea.

DORINDA: A very foolish one.

EDWARDS: Has it never occurred to you, Mrs. Carp, that everyone ... even the waitresses and ditch-diggers of this world -- even the drunken bum -- has some kind of idea about himself. Nothing to do with making money ... some idea of a way he could pull his weight and be the person God meant him to be.

EDWARDS: That's the immortal spark ... the drive ... that's what pulled man out of the slime .. and out of the tree ... and out of the cave ... and it's what will pull him out of the joyless, fenced-in world of the money-changer. Of course some people have a bit longer pull than others --

DORINDA: Evolution! I might have known ... you and that Darwin.

EDWARDS: (Quietly) No. It never occurred to you, Mrs. Carp. You have no doubts.

(Dudley Carp enters)

DUDLEY: What's all this, Edwards? If you want to see me, I've got an office.

EDWARDS: Sit down, Dudley.

DUDLEY: I can't spare much time.

EDWARDS: This won't take long.

DORINDA: We've got the press, Dudley. The Lotus Club own it.

EDWARDS: Yes, it looks like the Eye Opener and Sheep Creek are about to sever connections. You wouldn't have anything to do with that?

DUDLEY: I don't belong to the Lotus Club.

EDWARDS: That's right, isn't it? Well, I liked this town, but it seems it was you or me and you moved fastest. But before I go there's one little matter I'd like cleared up.

DUDLEY: Yes?

EDWARDS: Mrs. Gudgeon, who sold you the three city lots we were talking about today?

MRS. GUDGEON: Why, Mr. Carp, of course.

EDWARDS: They're no good, Mrs. Gudgeon ... never will be any good. They're four miles up the river on a gravel patch.

MRS. GUDGEON: Oh no, Mr. Edwards ... oh they can't be ....

EDWARDS: You might as well have thrown your money away.

MRS. GUDGEON: It was all I had ... all Carl left me. Are you sure, lad?

EDWARDS: I had Paddy Nolan check them. This is his answer.

MRS. GUDGEON: Mr. Carp ...

DUDLEY: There's just some mistake, Mrs. Gudgeon.

EDWARDS: No, there's no mistake. Well, Dudley, I win her anyway. This is the first clear-cut case of fraud I've been able to catch you in -- I've had to hint at the rest.

DUDLEY: Mrs. Gudgeon, you don't believe him before me do you? My old friend, do you think I'd ...

EDWARDS: We don't need golden words, Dudley. You sold the lots to Mrs. Gudgeon for three hundred dollars. You knew they were no good. If you don't return her money here and now I'll publish 20,000 copies of a story exposing the whole dirty business. Then what will your electors say?

DUDLEY: That's blackmail, Edwards.

EDWARDS: An ugly word but this is an ugly business. I've never used my paper, here or anywhere else for any motive but the public good ... as I see it. I never will. And I'll stoop to blackmail unless you --

DORINDA: Pooh! You can't publish anything without a press.

DUDLEY: You forgot that, didn't you?

EDWARDS: I've got plenty of time. I can write the story by hand ... or borrow a child's printing set ... Don't worry ... I don't need a printing press to rock Alberta with this tory ... a special edition devoted all to you.

DUDLEY: I'll have you in jail for this.

EDWARDS: That's fine. Good day, Mr. and Mrs. Carp.

DUDLEY: What do you want, Edwards?

EDWARDS: I want Mrs. Gudgeon's money returned ... with interest .. and I want her to have a clear title to the house she occupies. Oh yes, I want Mrs. Wize invited to join the Lotus Club too. That's all.

DORINDA: Dudley, are you going to let this man --

DUDLEY: Of course I'm going to settle this matter, Dorinda. (Suavely) You might be a little less belligerent, Bob. Mrs. Gudgeon, I'm so sorry that I failed to check those lots ... some mistake in the office of course. I wouldn't see you lose out for the world, Mrs. Gudgeon. Here's my cheque for three hundred and twenty-five dollars. (He writes cheque)

MRS. GUDGEON: Oh thank you, Mr. Carp. I knew there was some mistake.

DUDLEY: These things will happen to a busy man, you know. Inefficient office help.

EDWARDS: Return the deeds to him, Mrs. Gudgeon.

MRS. GUDGEON: Oh yes, of course. (She retires behind coat rack)

EDWARDS: How much did you pay for the press, Mrs. Carp?

DORINDA: Two hundred dollars.

EDWARDS: I suggest that sum be payment in full for the house.

DORINDA: I can't very well do that. You'll have to ask the church board.

EDWARDS: Then it doesn't belong to the Lotus Club?

DORINDA: I'm not sure ... I don't believe ... oh, I'm all upset.

MRS. GUDGEON: But Mrs. Carp, you told me --

DUDLEY: Now, now, Mrs. Gudgeon. Mr. Edwards and I will approach the church Board. I'm sure everything can be -

MRS. GUDGEON: That's a wicked thing, Mrs. Carp, telling me you could put me out. (with spirit) Here's your two hundred dollars. I'm not selling you my press at all. I'll thank you kindly for that paper I signed.

DUDLEY: Give it to her, Dorinda.

DORINDA: (Tossing it at her) I'M going home, Dudley. I'm leaving this town. There is not room in it for this man and me ....

EDWARDS: About Mrs. Wize, and the Lotus Club, Mrs. Carp -

DORINDA: Never.

DUDLEY: This story would kill my chances, Dorinda -- You must agree.

DORINDA: Very well, but I'll resign. Do you mean to say you trust this man not to spread the whole story across his rag of a paper?

EDWARDS: Dudley knows I keep my word, Mrs. Carp. Now that you've met my terms, the matter can drop. That doesn't mean that I won't continue to oppose your husband's campaign.

DUDLEY: Here's your cheque.

MRS. GUDGEON: Thank you, Sir.

EDWARDS: Well, it's been an interesting morning. Perhaps you'll drop in again ... Good-day Mrs. Carp .. Mr. Carp. I must get back to the Eye Opener. (He seats himself at his desk)

DORINDA: (Shaking with anger) You trickster! (She leaves behind Dudley, slamming the door after her)

MRS. GUDGEON: Thank, you, Mr. Edwards ... you're a good man and a smart one too.

EDWARDS: We newspaper people must stick together, Mrs. Gudgeon.

MRS. GUDGEON: What are you writing, lad.

EDWARDS: It's a kind of prayer, Mrs. Gudgeon ... I was going to publish it this week ...

MRS. GUDGEON: A prayer? In the Eye Opener?

EDWARDS: Why not? Even clowns -- and rogues occasionally look beyond the stars, Mrs. Gudgeon.

MRS. GUDGEON: Would you read it to me, sir?

EDWARDS: All right, now let's see ... (He hunts for two or three slips of paper)

(Reading) "Lord, let me keep a straight way in the path of honour ... and a straight face in the presence of solemn asses. Let me not truckle to the high, nor bulldoze the low; let me frolic with the jack and the joker and win the game. Lead me into Truth and Beauty -- and tell me her name. Keep me sane, but not too sane. Let me not take the world or myself too seriously, and grant more people to laugh with and fewer to laugh at. Let me condemn no man because of his grammar and no woman on account of her morals, neither being responsible for either. Preserve my sense of humour and of values and proportions. Let me be helpful while I live, but not live too long. Which is about all today, Lord. Amen."

MRS. GUDGEON: Thank you, sir. (Quietly) Goodbye, lad. I'll be going home now.

EDWARDS: (Smiling) Goodbye, Mrs. Gudgeon. (Mrs. Gudgeon goes out quickly and Edwards picks up his pencil thoughtfully as the

CURTAIN FALLS